

Head Start gets new start as Star Blanket Cree Nation opens new early learning centre ^[1]

Federal government allocated 700K for new facility that replaces aging building with mould

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EXCERPTS

Young children at Star Blanket Cree Nation finally have a new building to learn in and leaders in the community couldn't be more happy.

The new modular building for the Coweneska Head Start Learning Centre was constructed in Prince Albert, Sask., and transported to the First Nation, located about 100 km northeast of Regina, last July.

The name of the centre, Coweneska, is a Cree term that translates to "wake up" or "rise up."

Michael Starr, chief of Star Blanket Cree Nation, said the reserve was in dire need of a new early learning centre due to the condition of the old building.

"We were worried and concerned for our young people and our staff," said Starr.

"The old building was deteriorating, we had a lot of mould conditions starting to develop. We did our best to remove that but it was still [a problem]."

According to Starr, the previous building wasn't new when it was acquired from another First Nation in the early 1990s.

Federal funding

The federal government contributed \$700,000 for the new building.

"In my initial tours there were some very rough-looking daycare centres that we were housing our children in, and that's not acceptable," said Alexander Campbell, regional executive for Indigenous Services Canada.

The Head Start program, which is free for parents of Star Blanket Cree Nation, is funded by the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Health Services and Indigenous Services Canada.

Every \$1 spent on early childhood education pays back \$6 later, report finds

Culture and language

Rhonda Deutsch, co-ordinator of the Coweneska Head Start Learning Centre, said that culture and language is at the centre of the early learning program which is designed for children between the ages of one and five.

A resident and band member of Star Blanket Cree Nation, she has worked with the centre for 17 years and her own children also attended the program.

Deutsch said the staff try to teach the children about the importance of sharing and caring.

"We try to create almost like a home sense feeling, that they're just being schooled at home," she said.

"I think that's just better for them."

She said the new building is a vast improvement over the old one.

"Our other building had so many issues," said Deutsch.

"The other building had so many rooms... With this building, everywhere you look you can see what's going on."

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Chief Bobby Cameron said he was glad to see a new building for the Head Start program.

"We talk about reconciliation," he said.

"This is a perfect example about investment from the federal government to [the] little ones," said Cameron.

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