

Manitoba Métis Federation excited about early learning programming ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Supporting early childhood literacy and cultural revitalization, the Manitoba Metis Federation has launched a series of programs geared toward the entire family.

The goal of the organization's latest programming is to provide wrap-around support for children and their parents, said MMF Minister of Early Learning and Child Care Frances Chartrand.

"Metis people are proud. We're proud of our language. We're proud of our culture. We're proud of our dance. We just want to make sure that people know, Chartrand said.

Launching on Feb. 8, the free Little Metis Literacy Program will explore and celebrate Metis language and culture using play-based learning that fosters the development of literacy. It will also help to develop beneficial family literacy efforts using role modelling.

The eight-week literacy and parenting program targets children between the ages of three and five years of age and has a capacity of about 25 spaces for parents and children.

"We'll do Metis storytelling, Metis crafts. We're able to socialize and have fun, and then we get to watch the parents interact and spend some time with their children. It's learning for the children and the families, Chartrand said. "We'll talk about tracing our Metis roots, where we come from so they can understand."

My Little Metis Box has also been created as a take-home kit to promote learning and culture, she said. The box includes a book, cultural knowledge, life skills tips, cooking activities, language and artist spotlights to help promote child development.

The box was sent to families during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and saw more than 1,000 boxes distributed across the globe in the initial roll-out.

Other upcoming programs include Super Dads and Super Kids aimed at children between three and six years of age and Maa-Maan Pi Soon Biibii for children between the ages of one and two.

The throughline of MMF programming, Chartrand said, is to promote literacy and learning while revitalizing culture. She added the programs offered through Early Learning and Child Care have seen a massive intake and interest in the community.

The programming incorporates learning Michif, Metis cooking, parenting, land-based activities and culture knowledge passing.

The MMF has incorporated elders into the sessions to help ensure they are able to share their knowledge and guidance, Chartrand said, while providing wraparound education and support.

She added in the community in many cases, elders are young grandparents. This made it especially critical to include them in the multi-generational programming.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced all MMF programming to be online for now, but there is a hope to host face-to-face support when it is possible and deemed safe.

When in-person programming is allowed, proof of double vaccination will be required. She added as health measures are eased and in-person programming is once again possible MMF will have a hybrid of options in place so parents can choose face-to-face or online activities

The development of a strong MMF Early Learning and Child Care framework of support after the creation of the department in part through federal funding.

While the Head Start Program has been available across the country and on First Nations, Chartrand said, Metis people have been left out

of these initiatives.

The new department will offer support to Metis communities across Manitoba after securing funding from the federal government for the next 10 years specifically in support of early learning and child care.

"Early learning, I believe, is the foundation of your educational journey. If you start your learning your language and start learning your culture and you start learning your heritage and where you come from, it will set you up, and you'll never forget," Chartrand said. "You can pass it down from one generation to the next generation.

In 2018, the release of the Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework marked the beginning of the Manitoba Metis Federation Early Learning and Child Care department. The Framework was developed through community consultations to establish guiding principles to follow when providing culturally relevant child care programs for our Metis children.

A few years later, as a response to this framework, the "Metis Nation Early Learning and Childcare Accord" was created to enhance Metis children's access to Early Learning and Child Care programs

The Accord was signed between the Government of Canada and the Metis Nation, including the MMF as a signatory.

"Everyone is responsible for education, so if you look at it and you look at what's happening. I think that the people that are involved in education, they think that it's just the teacher's business, or people think it's early childhood education business, but it's everybody's business," Chartrand said.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: indigenous early learning and child care ^[4]

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