

Children, housing at centre of Abegweit First Nation 50th anniversary ^[1]

First Nation marks major infrastructure milestones, 'I'll start building more,' says chief

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EXCERPTS

Hundreds of people gathered Thursday to celebrate several major milestones for Abegweit First Nation on P.E.I.

It was the band's 50th anniversary celebration, marking five decades of self governance since its split from the Lennox Island First Nation.

To mark the occasion, the community opened its new daycare centre. Chief Junior Gould said the new childcare facility will provide a strong foundation for the community's future.

"Giving the kids the opportunity right off the get go at the early childhood learning center to give them the skillset to be a protective part of society and be in control of their own destiny," said Chief Gould.

"This is a great opportunity. The Abegweit First Nation has fought for years [so] that we can provide these services for children in the community and give them a great start."

Gerard Gould, health director at Abegweit First Nation, said the community had been struggling with moving its child-care centre from one location to another.

"The daycare started in a chapel a long time ago in a basement," he said.

"We upgraded to a 60-year-old building — a bungalow we inherited in the community — and we moved out back near the wellness center. Decrepit building — it was disheartening and pretty sad to have our children, our future, in a building like that."

Thursday's event also featured a second major infrastructure development: the groundbreaking ceremony for a new housing project. The first phase of the project will see three passive solar homes added to the community.

The new homes will be prioritized for community members who have been displaced over time and want to return. Chief Gould said the new homes help to strengthen a different form of self-governance for residents.

"An individual who has never had the opportunity and respect from federal government, or [from] assimilation programs such as residential schools, to give them the power to feed themselves, take care of themselves, put a roof over their heads ... in a bed that they can call their own, give them the tools to take care of themselves," he said.

"That's what I'd like to see in the next 50 years."

"As soon as these houses are built, I'll start building more," he said.

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[3]

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