Inuit childcare centre looks to connect children with their language, culture [1]

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EXCERPTS

There's a new early childhood education centre in Ottawa which aims to connect Inuit pre-school kids to their language and culture.

The Pirurviapik Child Care Centre opened earlier this month and is located in a place called the Community Hub – the site of the old Rideau High School in Ottawa's east end.

It is operated by Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families.

"Having an Inuit-specific childcare centre in an urban setting is very important to families who are coming down from up north whether it be from Nunavut or Nunavik," Inuuqatigiit executive director Mikki Adams says. "To ensure that their children are still connected to our Inuit culture and traditions and still being brought up with our IQ values and principles."

The centre has capacity for up to 49 children and is based on the IQ (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit) principles of strengthening Inuit culture, families and community in an urban setting.

Inuuqatigiit early years director Heather Ochalski says traditional language immersion at a young age is vital and the sooner the better.

"For infants to hear the sounds," she says. "The alphabet, the songs and for teachers to use the Inuktitut alphabet and sounds so that the children acquire those sounds by a certain milestone age."

Adams says without the necessary supports it is easy for Inuit people to become disconnected from their language and culture when moving from remote northern communities to a large metropolitan area like Ottawa.

"It can be very culture shocking when you're moving from a community of 1,000 people to Ottawa which has a population of one million people. Learning all the differences within living in this city. How to transport yourself from one section of the city to another. How to put your children into programs and how to get groceries or how to navigate the healthcare system. It can be very challenging and daunting."

Ochalski adds they hope the centre will help Inuit families fight this disconnection and maintain pride in their community roots while living in the city.

"It can be challenging and extremely challenging because there's competing forces, right? And often, certainly for my generation, I think it's changing for the younger generation, but to be proud of who you are and where you come from and this is what I believe we are doing here."

The renovations for the Pirurviapik Child Care Centre took three years in the making and cost $1 million.

The City of Ottawa, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and Ontario government all provided money for the project.

Region: Ontario [3]
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