

Child-care centre offers culturally relevant education to Ottawa's Inuit youth ^[1]

Pirurviapik can accommodate up to 49 children aged 6 months to 5 years

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EXCERPTS

A new child-care centre designed to deliver culturally relevant early childhood education for Ottawa's large Inuit community is opening. Pirurviapik, meaning "a place to grow" in Inuktitut, will operate year-round out of a dedicated space at Rideau High School in the city's Vanier neighbourhood.

Operated by the Inuuqatigiit Centre, an Ottawa-based Inuit cultural organization, the new child-care space can accommodate up to 49 Inuit children from six months to five years of age. That total will include 10 infants, 15 toddlers and 24 pre-school students.

"The Inuit culture has tried to survive in an urban setting," said Stephanie Mikki Adams, the centre's executive director, at an open house Saturday.

"Ensuring that our children still have the knowledge and capability to speak, write and understand Inuktitut is very important to ensure that our culture and language thrives."

The centre took three years to complete, according to a press release from the Inuuqatigiit Centre, and included a renovation of the Rideau High School space to fit Inuit design elements.

The \$1 million renovation was funded by the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and the province of Ontario.

Largest Inuit population outside Nunavut

Statistics Canada estimates Ottawa's Inuit population at around 1,800, but that number is likely a significant underrepresentation.

Inuit health agencies in Ottawa estimate the true number to be thousands more, and around 6,000 Inuit are registered with the Ottawa-based Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team.

Heather Ochalski, director of early learning at Pirurviapik, said the new centre helps meet the needs of Inuit youth by immersing them in an environment where caregivers speak Inuktitut and by supplying them with culturally significant toys and games.

"It's part of identity development," she said. "It shows us where we come from, our kinships, our history, and where we are going as Inuit in contemporary Canada."

'Cultural revitalization'

Natasha Cant praised the program for giving her adopted daughters, Laetitia Amaroalik Cant and Giselle Amitnaaq Cant, a place to learn about their language and culture.

"There's such a great cultural revitalization," she said. "It makes them very proud of who they are and their culture."

Adams said the program responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 12th call to action, which recommends the development of "culturally appropriate early childhood education programs" for Indigenous families.

"Serving a child means serving a family," Adams said.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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culture ^[5]

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education-ottawas-inuit

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/09/child-care-centre-offers-culturally-relevant-education-ottawas-inuit> [2] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/inuit-childcare-centre-1.6586806> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8994> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8946> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care>