



Press release

For immediate release

Policy on homelessness: Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre's recommendations heard

Val-d'Or, February 28, 2014 – The Native Friendship Centre is thrilled at the news that the Quebec government's new policy on homelessness recognizes it is an emerging issue in regional cities such as Val-d'Or. Homelessness affects the First Nations and the Inuit too. The policy clarifies the necessity of taking "history and culture" into account—a sign that the Aboriginal voice was heard during the public consultation process.

Since the government first addressed the issue in 2008, the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre has emphasized two key issues that are central to the fight against homelessness in Quebec: the need to see the issue through the lens of small towns far from major urban centres and the importance of tailoring responses in ways that are culturally appropriate and reassuring for homeless members of the First Nations and Inuit communities. "Reading through this new policy on poverty and homelessness, entitled *Ensemble, pour éviter la rue et s'en sortir* (working together to stay off the street and find our path), we are pleased to see that the Centre's work and the experience of our homeless Aboriginal brothers and sisters have influenced the government's orientations," says Oscar Kistabish, President of the Val d'Or Friendship Centre's Board of Directors.

The Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre enthusiastically supports the approach advocated in the policy on combatting homelessness, which outlines five priority areas: housing; health and social services; income; education and social integration; and harmonious coexistence. According to the Friendship Centre's Executive Director Edith Cloutier, "These measures support 40 years of efforts by the Native Friendship Centre to eliminate poverty and social exclusion for aboriginal Val d'Or citizens. These priority areas are indeed wind in the Centre's sails for initiatives such as KIJATÉ, a project to build 24 social housing units for Native families." Now that the homelessness policy has been made public, the Friendship Centre is working to develop tangible measures for the government's forthcoming action plan. These recommendations should not only take regional realities into account but, even more importantly, must rally our community around this social issue.

A central gathering place and public forum, the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre advocates for the individual and collective rights, interests and well-being of the Aboriginal people faced with the reality of an urban environment.

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