

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto



May 6, 2020

Dear Mayor Tory,

I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to engage with you and your office through a video conference with TASSC member agencies on April 20th. I appreciate your leadership and inclusion of Indigenous organizations and perspectives as we collectively move through COVID-19 together.

I am writing today to express my appreciation for your ongoing concern about the safety and well-being of children and youth in our city. I know that you are keenly aware that home may not be a safe place for children. Currently, we are seeing a 40% reduction in referrals to child and family well-being agencies across the province and yet we are aware that the stress, isolation and economic hardships experienced by families are likely to put children and youth at increased risk for child maltreatment. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) is working to address these risks through a comprehensive approach to the physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual needs of our families which has helped to inform the City's Mental Health Response table.

In an effort to inform both the City of Toronto's and Provincial response to the pandemic, we have been talking periodically with a group of children's service providers from Italy that includes social workers, medical doctors and academics. One of the many lessons learned from these virtual meetings is their strong recommendation to incorporate outdoor play for children and youth, particularly those who have no access to outdoor space. This is consistent with literature that clearly demonstrates the importance of physical activity and exposure to the outdoors for healthy child development, managing mental health, and for the general health and wellness. It is also consistent with recommendations from Outdoor Play Canada <https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/should-i-go-outside-in-the-covid-19-era/> and the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of the Citizen <http://www.ipacanada.org/covid-19/statement-play-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>.

I have consulted with my colleagues who are members of the Social Pediatrics group at Sick Children's Hospital and this letter is our endorsement of a strategy to begin planning access to outdoor spaces and camps for the summer of 2020. We would be happy to help develop creative options that address the need for physical activity while maintaining safe public health practices. One of the options Native Child & Family Services is suggesting would be to designate

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greenspace for the use of community organizations according to a schedule. A single staff could meet a family who is self-isolating and provide outdoor programming while physically distancing. This would have significant impact for Indigenous peoples, who we know require trauma-informed land-based practice for health and wellness during difficult times. The signatories below would be very pleased to assist with the development of other options for outdoor play.

Please let me know if you, or anyone else at the City, would be open to a conversation about how we can ensure access to safe outdoor programming for children and families and we move through spring and into the summer in Toronto.

Thank you,



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