



NESKANTAGA FIRST NATION



Mamow Sha-way-gi-kay-win: North-South Partnership for Children



## Tragedy in a Ring of Fire First Nation: Call to Action

### Backgrounder: Neskantaga First Nation

Neskantaga First Nation is an isolated fly-in Oji-Cree First Nation community located in northern Ontario along Attawapiskat Lake. The community itself covers approximately 831 hectares of vast northern Ontario landscape and has an estimated population of 420 residents, 60 percent of whom are youth.

This northern community has been, and continues to be, plagued by deplorable conditions which can only be described as fourth world. Neskantaga struggles with inadequate housing, the existence of mould in most family homes, an unemployment rate that exceeds 80 per cent, no access to safe drinking water, the lack of fresh, affordable and nutritious food, lack of adequate health and mental health services, youth having to leave their community in order to attend high school at age 14, high rates of prescription drug abuse, and the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma. These distressing conditions play a role in the appallingly high number of youth suicides. If any of these life threatening conditions were identified in Kitchener, Kingston, Sudbury or any other community in Ontario, there would be an immediate public outcry resulting in meaningful actions.

In this small community of 400 members, there have been seven youth suicides (7) and twenty seven suicide attempts (27) over a twelve month period which forced Chief Peter Moonias to declare a state of emergency in the spring of 2013. Since that time, the community has been calling on all levels of government, health providers, the justice community, social service agencies and families to collectively support Neskantaga during their time of crisis. While a number of initiatives were started to assist the community in dealing with their grief, suicides of young people continue. Regrettably, since the summer of 2013, three (3) more youth have taken their lives with the most recent suicide of a 16 year-old girl, which occurred on April 2, 2014. Until the basic needs and fundamental issues facing this community are adequately addressed, Neskantaga First Nation will be in a continual state of emergency.

### Call to Action:

It is time to take action to address the fundamental issues facing Neskantaga First Nation that drive youth to tragically ending their lives: safe drinking water, food security, environmental concerns, housing, unemployment, education/training opportunities, recreation, social entrepreneurship, cultural revitalization and so on. There are many individuals, voluntary sector agencies and government organizations in Ontario with the skills, resources and motivation to mobilize a plan of action in partnership with the people of Neskantaga First Nation. It is time to come together with the intent of collectively making change happen. Please join us on:

**Date:** April 29, 2014

**Time:** 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm

**Location:** Park Hyatt Toronto | 4 Avenue Road | Queen's Park South Ballroom | Toronto, ON, M5R 2E8

### For more information, contact:

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