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SCO APPLAUDS EFFORTS TO PROTECT HOMELESS We Call on Everyone to Support the Community Caring Camp– Grand Chief

February 12, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is pledging its support for an Indigenous led movement to help care for Winnipeg’s homeless population.

“It is unfathomable to think that in a wealthy nation state such as Canada, we have anyone left outside to face the elements, especially extreme cold,” said Grand Chief Daniels. “I went out last night to hand out winter supplies and warm drinks and to meet with our people; it is heartbreaking. I want to commend and celebrate our Relatives who are saying this is wrong and are stepping up to save lives.”

A coalition of Indigenous grassroots organizations and volunteers set up two teepees and a prospector tent beside Thunderbird House in downtown Winnipeg on Tuesday. It has been named the Community Caring Camp. The structures were erected as places of refuge from the bitterly cold temperatures hammering the city this past week.

The teepees and tent were donated by EJ Fontaine, a member of Sagkeeng First Nation, and Eva Wilson-Fontaine, a member of Peguis First Nation. The camp itself was organized and set up by volunteer coordinator Rylee Nepinak, co-founder of the youth group Anishiative.

“Anishinaabe are known as the big-hearted people. EJ and Eva along with Rylee embody that definition,” continued Grand Chief Daniels. “I am so proud of their initiative and compassion and I know their remarkable efforts are saving lives. Now it’s our turn to collectively step up as well, and end the preventable suffering of people who are experiencing homelessness.”

The need for this kind of refuge has been exacerbated as nearby homeless shelters are currently at capacity due to COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions. There have also been several published reports of people trying to find shelter in Winnipeg Transit bus shacks and other unheated spaces. Given the extreme cold temperatures Manitoba is experiencing, SCO is emphatic that this is a dire and potentially lethal situation that must be rectified.

“This is not a hidden issue by any stretch of the imagination,” remarked Grand Chief Daniels. “Every day in the streets of Winnipeg, we see first-hand the intergenerational tragedies of colonization and residential schools. Our people make up the majority of those experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg, and I hope the efforts of our Relatives will be noticed by all levels of government, and that they finally begin to take real and decisive action to put an end to this ongoing tragedy.”

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[The latest Winnipeg Street Census Report from 2018](#) reveals that Winnipeg's homeless population is over 70 per cent Indigenous – nearly half of whom have spent time in the Child and Family Services system. The report also recommends the application of an Indigenous cultural lens to programs and policies that help people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

“Until Winnipeggers and Manitobans demand better from their governments, governments will not right this multi-generational wrong,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. It is up to each of us and our allies to build the infrastructure and tackle this complex problem of homelessness. Each person is sacred and all of us bear responsibility for the choices our society makes and what we choose to accept from our governments. Let's take immediate action and support the Community Caring Camp – and let's commit to addressing the systemic issues that leave our brothers and sisters out in the cold trying to survive against all odds.”

SCO employees are making a staff donation to the Community Caring Camp, and SCO will match that donation while challenging all other First Nations, governments, and businesses to do the same. We also encourage all individuals who are able to donate to do so immediately.

Lives depend on it.

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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