

Letter to a Future Child

January 10, 2016

To my future children,

When you were born

You were born in a time when Sheshatshiu and Natuashish was changing. There was a movement to make things healthier, to make things better. People worked towards a bright future for you and for your children because many people were sad and lonely for different reasons and some even felt lost and hopeless.

It was hard to experience and be surrounded by this reality

It was not nice seeing Innu babies taken away from families. Mommies and daddies getting into trouble with the law, and sometimes daddies having to go away for long periods time. It was not very nice when the parents would drink because they could not see the hope that lingered around them. There were even times when mommies would drink when her baby was still in her tummy. And other times the mommies and daddies would get so upset they no longer wanted to see themselves. It wasn't just them, there were quite a lot of people who didn't like seeing their reflections in the mirrors they looked in.

It was not nice at all when you had family that couldn't go anywhere for a vacation because they needed to stick around for their dialysis. You know what dialysis is right? It's when your kidneys don't work and you are hooked up to a machine to clean your blood. It's like the machine are your kidneys but outside of your body. Sometimes your kidneys stopping working when you have diabetes and don't eat or drink the right things.

But we had a plan...

Mary Janet Hill

You see, with so much drinking happening, some babies were born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the need was recognized to have these people living with FASD supported, that's why the Community has a team of professionals, like the Occupational Therapist, Speech Language Pathologist, a Psychiatrists, and Life Coaches working together along with the FASD Liaison, they go into the homes, the school and workplaces to help support these people just deal with everyday life issues, like planning meals, grocery shopping, money management, scheduling, speaking, learning to ride a bike, and other more harder things like keeping a job, going to court, remembering to properly care for their children, and managing their emotions. and they also have a support group that speaks to young women on a regular basis and just share their story about all the hard stuff they are faced with and help raise the

awareness about drinking while pregnant. So these people living with FASD actually help others now by encouraging them to have alcohol free pregnancies.

Annie Picard

A few years back, Innu leaders from the two Innu communities along with their staff came together to create a new story, a story that everyone in this room today would come to understand of how important of a role they play in re-building a healthier Innu community, not just for you but, for your friends too. Everyone in this room would like to leave a gift with you, a gift that's not tangible but more so, in a form of a feeling that we all hope will help carry you thru your lifetime, it's the feeling of honour, a feeling that will surround each and every step you take, everywhere you go, you will see our footprints, we will leave a piece of our work you will come to see. Do you see that Youth Centre? It's the building up on the hill beside the Mary May Healing Centre, you should hear the excitement in Amanda's voice when she talks about the karaoke events she will be organizing (Amanda is a great singer, I'm hoping she produces a CD so you can enjoy some Innu tunes), Nastahiss can't wait to teach you and your friends some of her new exercises and Pauline, she's always talking about being the first one to cook a pot of healthy fresh Caribou Soup for you when you plan to attend one of her Youth Cooking Sessions. I guess you can tell, everyone is excited about all the special activities that will be happening, you see, it's all a part of the plan. I want you to remember that every step taken was a step for you.

Natasha Hurley

There was a time when our culture was not a priority. We are moving forward for you and your friends to bring light to your future. We have worked hard to embrace two worlds that we live in. We have learned that families were hurting due to loss of our culture, traditions and our way of life. That is why we are having community gatherings, traditional food cooking classes, and traditional parenting programs. This knowledge we have now came from your parents, grandparents and great grandparents. One day you will need to leave what you know to your future generations

LCCM/MushuaU

Drugs are bad and do not take drugs. Our leaders today are fighting hard to ensure drugs become non-existent in Natuashish. Today is challenging because of the drug use in our home town. Fight to keep our language alive and not loose it. To keep our ways of life, our culture alive. Never lose sight of the respect for animals. The old hunting grounds are important to you, your family and our people. Always respect our elders, they are the key to our past as Innu people and our way of life and how we have survived. Our community is changing and a lot of our own Innu people are going out to

get educated and coming back to help our community. Education is the key to being successful.

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Every day after school, my two grandkids would come to my office and every time I would be in a meeting and one of the grandchildren would say; “Why are you in a meeting? What is a meeting? What it is about?” At home, grandkids were watching Television, people were gathering around a big table and one of the grandkids asked, “Are they in a meeting too?” I told him that we meet to discuss things; how to work together. There are big plans underway to provide for a better future. A curious child will always ask the question of “why, do you do this and that?” Why is it important? I would reply; “everything I do is because of you”.

LCCM/MushuaU

My wish is for my future child to know about the story of the Innu people, the Innu timeline, the history and the Innu culture. It is sad that Innu people in the past did not know their history. The future child will know and be stronger for knowing. There will be opportunities and choices – resources, services, programs, activities, education and economic development. Parents will be health and sober. The future child will be PROUD of who they are. Culture and traditional ways of life will be supported in communities.

IMC Working Group

- Keep the healthy spirit alive
- Healthy support system
- Many recreational programs (not just hockey)
- Continue with hard work and dedication
- Keep culture alive

- Healthier pregnancies (physical activity and healthy food)
- Prepare healthy foods with Manut foods
- Prepare traditional food
- Cultural activities available
- Own grocery store

IMC Working Group

We had a big vision but just like you we had to grow and learn to stand up and take small steps before we could run. We've come to learn the importance of working together, to understand what it means to say it takes a strong, proud, Innu community to raise a child. We didn't accept that there was no hope. We were always trying to be hopeful and look for solutions to move forward. It's not just the Innu who were doing this, non-Innu this, non-Innu joined in with us too and we could see that they too wanted to help, they wanted to understand. We know our role was to rebuild our culture, that it had been such a strong culture before we move into the villages so we had to stay focused on rebuilding so you can be proud to be Innu.

IMC Committee

A big part of the plan was Innu deciding to take control of their own health. We had to help people understand where the problems were and worked all together; the nurses, the community health planners, all of us! The plan was to tell the stories of today, with data, but to help change the story of tomorrow. That way, we were able to be as healthy as our grandparents; a proud Innu person who knows who they are, speaks the language and knows how to survive on the land.

IMC Working Group

We want you to know that you are loved and valued. The healing that has happened in the community is proof of that love. You have so much potential. We are so proud of you. Always be honored of who you are and where you come from. Like our ancestors before us have done passing the knowledge to us we are now passing it to you. It is important to never lose sight of your Innu identity as it is the foundation of who you are. Don't lose hope and if you don't see change happen quickly as it is slow process. Be willing to learn, be patient and be resilient. We are leaving it up to you to be our champions.

IMC Working Group