



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **AKWESASNE CELEBRATES NEW PROGRAM OFFICE IN CORNWALL TO ASSIST CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

*CORNWALL* — It is with great enthusiasm that the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA) is celebrating the opening of an expanded program to assist children and families who are in need of child protection-related services.

The Akwesasne Representative and Advocacy Program (ARAP) officially opened its doors today at 55 Water Street, Cornwall, with the purpose to assist Mohawk families who are involved with Children's Aid Societies (CAS). The new location will improve our ability to support those who would ordinarily reside in Akwesasne but are currently residing anywhere else across Canada.

As a result of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act of 2017, CAS is required to make contact with a child's Indigenous community when a child is involved in CAS care. The purpose of contacting a First Nation community is to ensure Indigenous children do not lose connection to the culture and traditions associated with the First Nation, and ensures that the best interest of the children is represented.

The staff at the ARAP serve as representatives for the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne in child protection cases. ARAP provides services to children and their families in many forms, from cultural to judicial. Known also as "Band Reps," the staff are committed to assisting children and families with navigation of the court and social services system, while also establishing and maintaining connections, and providing cultural support.

The program is funded by Indigenous Services Canada and is the result of appeals to the Human Rights Commission. Band rep services have previously been provided by MCA's Department of Community & Social Services – specifically the Akwesasne Child & Family Services Program. New funding and legislation has made it possible to expand the program and open a new location, now under MCA's Akwesasne Justice Department.

"The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has offered limited band rep services for many years," said Grand Chief Abram Benedict. "Today we are proud to be able to expand our services and open a service location within the City of Cornwall. The Akwesasne Representative & Advocacy Program will provide culturally appropriate support to children and families from Akwesasne."

ARAP's services are available to any child or family across Canada who have Indian status or who are eligible to acquire Indian status with the Mohawks of Akwesasne. The CAS agency involved will connect with the client's First Nation band reps.

Today, we are celebrating our new location and further accessibility to all those who can benefit from our services.

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