

NEWS RELEASE



November 23, 2018

Pathways and United Way partner to launch Indigenous Youth Hub

Diamond Willow Youth Lodge a positive step on path toward truth and reconciliation

CALGARY – Pathways Community Services Association and United Way of Calgary and Area gathered with local youth, elders, and community members today to celebrate the official launch of the Diamond Willow Youth Lodge. The lodge will serve as a community gathering spot, a haven for Calgary’s Indigenous youth to connect with and celebrate their culture in a comfortable and comforting environment.

Housed in the basement of the historic Community Wise Resource Centre building in Calgary’s Beltline area, the lodge is a safe place for youth to drop-in to hang out with friends, connect with Elders, play air hockey or other games, get help with homework, or access other supports. Approximately 75 youth have used the lodge since its doors opened in late September.

The name Diamond Willow Youth Lodge, known until today as the Indigenous Youth Hub, was selected via social media and drop-box submissions. The final decision was made by the lodge’s Youth Council, which is made up of six Métis and First Nations youth.

“We were looking for a name that referenced our Indigenous culture but wasn’t a name which could be perceived as favouring one nation’s language over another as the lodge is all inclusive,” explained Princess Lightning, member of the Youth Council. “In our culture, we use diamond willow trees to build sweat lodges which are sacred, safe spaces for reflection and connection with the earth. It is our hope that Diamond Willow Youth Lodge provides that same sense of connection for Indigenous young people.”

Engaging Indigenous youth on the selection of the lodge’s name so they feel a sense of ownership and connection to it is a guiding principle applied to all decisions related to the lodge.

“The lodge is unique in that it reflects the voice of our Indigenous youth speaking out on what they want from this space,” said Kirby Redwood, Chief Executive Officer, Pathways Community Services Association. “We empower a youth-led, youth-driven culture and I’m very proud of how our youth have stepped up to claim the lodge as their own and work with us to ensure it meets their needs. It’s an iterative learning that requires us to be flexible and responsive.”

Redwood refers to the extensive consultation with Elders, youth, and community stakeholders that occurred during initial planning as an example. Feedback revealed that youth were not interested in set classes or programs, but preferred flexible and fluid offerings chosen by youth for youth. Accordingly, the lodge is offering a variety of drop-in activities and programs ranging from beading to basketball to resume writing based on suggestions received. If well attended, the program is continued. If not, something else is offered.

One of the most popular offerings so far has been the Drop-in Beating session on Thursday evenings, where about a dozen youth gather to hone their traditional drumming skills.

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“An important part of the path to understanding and reconciliation is regaining pride in our culture,” said Redwood. “The Diamond Willow Youth Lodge will provide a welcoming gathering place for Indigenous youth to celebrate their culture in many small ways – from smudging to storytelling – in an atmosphere of comfort and acceptance for people of all cultures.”

“United Way is proud to partner with Pathways and support the building of relationships between Indigenous youth and Elders in a safe, non-stigmatizing setting,” said Beth Gignac, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Calgary and Area. “Indigenous youth face unique, complex social challenges that stem from suppressed culture, identity, and spirituality.”

Healing from intergenerational trauma and reclaiming identity is a foundational step in helping Indigenous youth meet their own definition of success. Our investment in the lodge will help Indigenous youth in our city address physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs to build healing, reconciliation, and opportunities to create a positive future.”

The Diamond Willow Youth Lodge is a partnership between Pathways Community Services Association and United Way. Throughout the project, United Way has provided leadership, leveraged strong partnerships, and brought over 14 years of experience working with Indigenous communities. Pathways is a strong United Way partner that has been working in Calgary and area since 1988. They are well known for supporting vulnerable children and youth in a holistic way from a harm-reduction and strength-based perspective, with a focus on Indigenous traditions.

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About Pathways Community Services Association

Pathways Community Services Association is a registered charitable organization that is grounded in Indigenous teachings. We offer evidence-informed, supportive services for people in the Calgary area as they strengthen their circles of self, family, community, and culture.

About United Way of Calgary and Area

United Way of Calgary and Area brings together donors, corporations, agencies, and government to solve complex issues and improve the lives of more than 150,000 people every year. Since 1940, United Way has supported agencies that assist vulnerable Calgarians. Today, United Way invests in programs and collaborations that tackle root causes of social issues to help people overcome poverty, set kids up for success, and build strong communities.

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