



For Release March 10, 2017

Tungasuvvingat Inuit celebrates 30 years of serving the Inuit Community

On March 3, 1987 the original Board of Directors of Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) held a Board meeting at 507 Bronson Avenue which at the time was a shared space for Tungasuvvingat Inuit and the national Inuit organization Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (now Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami). The original Board members were Paul **Sammurtok**, President, Martha **Greig**, Vice-President, Lynda **Gunn**, Secretary-Treasurer and Ovilu **Goo Doyle**, Jessie **Falconer**. Brenda **Conboy** was also present, who started working at Tungasuvvingat Inuit as a Counsellor before going on to become the first Executive Director.

Despite all the changes and growth both in the community and with Tungasuvvingat Inuit since 1987, it still remains that welcoming and helping place for Inuit to find commonality, understanding and support in a foreign environment. The name Tungasuvvingat Inuit translates to 'a place where Inuit are welcome'. "It goes to show how the programs and services of TI remain relevant and needed today" said Executive Director, Jason LeBlanc

TI has remained responsive to the changing and diversifying needs of Inuit by guiding our evolution with the key principle of Inuit helping Inuit. Our work to empower and enhance the lives of Inuit through the provision of Inuit specific programs and services increases the inclusion of Inuit in Ontario and promotes the right of Inuit self determination. We would not continue to be a success without the support and involvement of Inuit. On the occasion of this anniversary we want to respect and thank the thousands of community members who over the years have shared their time, skills and passion with us. In addition, the hundreds of staff and volunteers who have dedicated themselves to serving the Inuit community.

Community consultations have led TI to focus on community development as well as direct service delivery. One development output has been the creation of Inuit organizations that T.I. cultivated. The community asked for a day care centre for Inuit and T.I. filled that need with a program that would eventually become the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre. The community asked for their own health clinic and the dedicated staff at T.I. created the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Health Team which has now self-incorporated as the Akausivik Inuit Health Centre. When no one else was delivering trauma informed healing and wellness within a traditional Inuit framework TI created the Mamisarvik program.

"I look back and I see how far this organization has come and it motivates me for how much we have yet to accomplish. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations we have great opportunity for increased inclusion and equity for Inuit. TI started off with one person and a passionate Board of Directors who recognized the needs for Inuit in Ottawa. We now have over 60 staff committed to helping improve

opportunities in Ontario for Inuit and we are not showing any signs of stopping in terms of growth. I'm quickly running out of space in our new building" said Jason LeBlanc.

In 1987, TI was formed in response to local needs but the board members had the vision to know these needs were being expressed in other cities and decided on a federal incorporation. In 2002, again in response to evolving needs and priorities of the community, TI held a community meeting and received endorsement to expand the mandate to a provincial level becoming the only provincial organization for Inuit in Ontario. 2005 offered another critical juncture when we led work with the federal government and Inuit partners across Canada to host the *One Voice* conference creating a platform for Inuit to share their realities living away from Inuit Nunangat - traditional Inuit homelands. In the years since, TI has continued to work with this growing population to support their self reliance and empowerment.

Now in its 30th year TI is releasing its second report to the Federal Government entitled "***National Urban Inuit Community Dialogue Supporting Local Champions: An Urban Inuit Strategy***". This report looks at how TI can help support local Inuit communities across Southern Canada in cities like Edmonton, Halifax, Toronto, Winnipeg, St. John's and Montreal. With the new census projection numbers for 2016, Inuit migration to southern rural and urban settings is only going to grow and TI will continue to work with and support this Inuit network.

Milestones like today are natural points for reflection and future vision. What do we see in the future for TI and for Inuit in Ontario? Guided by Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit values, we can have responsible and effective growth. Community has identified gaps for TI to address including the areas of justice, mental health and well-being, access to supports and benefits like Post-Secondary funding, child and family services and employment and training. TI will continue to deliver services but in order to effect systemic change we will increase awareness of Inuit with partners like the Ontario Government. The future holds an interconnected blend of direct service delivery and increased advocacy from our service expertise to strengthen the accountability of all providers to Inuit and their families.

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