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May 19, 2023

Executive of the NUCW
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Dear NUCW Executive,

It is my pleasure to share wonderful news with the National United Church Women of the first Healing Fund project supported by the NUCW community.

As of April 19, 2023, the total amount of gifts received to the Healing Fund from UCW members was \$5,077.60. Throughout the Spring 2023 Healing Fund review, our Healing Fund Working Group focused on our agreement that allows these gifts to support Indigenous Women, Children and Family programming that focuses on the healing of intergenerational trauma affected by Indian Residential Schools.

After carefully reviewing our applicants, our HPWG has selected **Regina Native Outreach Ministries** as the project supported by UCW for their “**Mother & Baby Welcome Bag**” program.

Below is a brief description of their program:

Regina Native Outreach Ministry's Mother & Baby Welcome Bags were created to address the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. Indigenous mothers giving birth at Regina General Hospital are subjected to racism, discrimination and violation of rights. Birth alerts, where hospital staff identify a mother as being unable care for her baby, are a continuing practice based on stereotypical and racist assumptions of Indigenous women as incompetent, promiscuous and bad, which were the same messages inflicted on Indigenous girls through residential schools.

RNOM gifts Indigenous mothers giving birth at Regina General Hospital with a large, reusable bag containing essential items for their newborn baby and themselves. For the newborns there are diapers, baby wipes, diaper rash cream, baby soap, burp clothes, sleeper, onesies and a handmade blanket (knit, crochet or quilted). For the mothers, there are personal care products like sanitary napkins, breast pads and a small gift such as socks, lip balm and a candle. Also included in the bag is a traditional medicine pouch containing the four traditional medicines of sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar that has been blessed by RNOM's ordained minister with a smudge and a prayer. These welcome bags also include a greeting card with a message of love, respect and caring to



let the new mother know she is not alone on her journey and an explanation of how the new mother may use the medicine pouch to connect with her ancestors. In addition, the welcome bags contain an information card with contacts for spiritual support and access to elders.

A full description of their program, goals and objectives are attached.

We invite you to share this news with NUCW congregations so that members will learn more of the RNOM program and will be able to support future Indigenous Healing programs alike.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to reach me.

In Spirit & Unity,



Joni Shawana

*Healing Program Coordinator
Indigenous Ministries & Justice
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About Mother & Baby Welcome Bags – Spring 2023 Healing Fund Project

Regina Native Outreach Ministry's Mother & Baby Welcome Bags were created to address the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. Indigenous mothers giving birth at Regina General Hospital are subjected to racism, discrimination and violation of rights. Birth alerts, where hospital staff identify a mother as being unable care for her baby, are a continuing practice based on stereotypical and racist assumptions of Indigenous women as incompetent, promiscuous and bad, which were the same messages inflicted on Indigenous girls through residential schools.

Birth alerts are disproportionately deployed against Indigenous, racialized and disabled parents. In some cases, birth alerts are issued solely because the mother is Indigenous, with very little factual information to show the mother is unable to care for her baby. In the past decade, non-Indigenous people have been learning more about the horrific history of the "60's Scoop". Despite all the talk about Truth and Reconciliation, the continued practise of birth alerts in Canada, and in particular in Regina's local hospital for maternity, is now the "Millennium Scoop".

The colonial systems (health care, foster care, social work) in place, continue to cause harm to these young women, and are especially harsh when a woman is extremely vulnerable (physically, emotionally and mental) just before, during and after the birthing process. Indigenous women face this struggle for reproductive justice because of colonialism, assimilation, and the Euro-Canadian biomedical model. Control of women's reproduction is, and has long been a part of colonial and neocolonial governance tools operated by the Canadian state with women's bodies being a primary target.

Although the Saskatchewan government announced that it would end its use of birth alerts on February 1, 2021, it did not enact any measures to address systemic racism, poverty and domestic violence. The practise of birth alerts continues today in Regina subjecting Indigenous mothers to trauma at a time when they need support, love and respect.

For example, the young Indigenous Mom who inspired the Mother & Baby Welcome Bags was subjected to threats of having her baby taken away from her during and immediately following the birthing. Her hospital room was not cleaned like it was for other new moms and she was made to feel very much second class and a bad mother.

RNOM gifts Indigenous mothers giving birth at Regina General Hospital with a large, reusable bag containing essential items for their newborn baby and themselves. For the newborns there are diapers, baby wipes, diaper rash cream, baby soap, burp clothes, sleeper, onesies and a handmade blanket (knit, crochet or quilted). For the mothers, there are personal care products like sanitary napkins, breast pads and a small gift such as socks, lip balm and a candle. Also included in the bag is a traditional medicine pouch containing the four traditional medicines of sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar that has been blessed by RNOM's ordained minister with a smudge and a prayer. These welcome bags also include a greeting card with a message of love, respect and caring to let the new mother know she is not alone on her journey and an explanation of how the new mother may use the medicine pouch to connect with her ancestors. In addition, the welcome bags contain an information card with contacts for spiritual support and access to elders.

The Mother & Baby Welcome Bags are meant to show the new mom that there are people in her community who care about her and who celebrate the birth of her baby. RNOM wants each new

mother to celebrate her new baby and to take pride in her Indigeneity. RNOM believes the welcome bags provide a tangible and loving a start to breaking the cycles of shame passed down from residential schools.

Flow of Mother & Baby Welcome Bag Collection/Assembly (4 times per year)

1. Notify Regina United Churches of the donation collection period (one month) and provide list of items needed.
2. Promote project during collection period on RNOM and Regina United Church's Facebook pages.
3. RNOM Board members collect donations from the churches at end of collection period.
4. RNOM's ordained minister blesses and smudges the medicines and elements for the medicine bundles.
5. RNOM Board members prepare medicine bundles, greeting cards and information cards.
6. RNOM Board members meet at one of the churches to assemble the bags and transport to the Regina General Hospital.
7. RNOM provides the bags to Regina's United Church Hospital Chaplin to be stored in her office at the Regina General Hospital
8. United Church Hospital Chaplin provides the bags to First Nations and Metis Services staff at Regina General to distribute to Indigenous new mothers.

Project Goals

Our current goal is every Indigenous woman giving birth at Regina General Hospital receives a Mother & Baby Welcome Bag to demonstrating she is not alone, that there are people in Regina who care about her and her newborn and to offer a way to connect to RNOM and other supports if she needs or wants such support.

RNOM is currently falling short of that goal. First Nations and Metis Services advises RNOM that births average 10 to 12 per each month (120 to 144 annually). RNOM has completed 4 assemblies in the past year totalling 108 bags. For our first two assemblies, the donations from the Regina United Church congregations were strong and very few items needed to be purchased by RNOM board members or by using RNOM funds. Donations dropped significantly for the third and fourth assemblies and required RNOM board to allocate funds to allow it to meet the target of a minimum of 25 bags per assembly. To sustain the Mother & Baby Welcome Bag project, RNOM cannot rely solely on the donations of the United Church members in Regina going forward.

RNOM's longer term goal is to provide advocacy to establish reproductive justice for Indigenous women and to offer a support circle for new, Indigenous Moms to meet weekly to share information, parenting experiences and challenges, and make friends all with the guidance of RNOM's ordained minister in a safe and supportive space.

Project Objectives

Assure Indigenous new mothers there are people in their community who care about them.

Provide some very basic elements for these moms as they leave the hospital to hopefully bridge them a few days until, if needed, they can connect with additional supports.

Increase awareness of the injustices committed against Indigenous mothers through:

- Beginning March 2023, RNOM is hosting a Knitting Circle to make baby blankets for the Mother & Baby Welcome Bags. Held twice a month at our Central Library, the Knitting Circle will gather community to knit and discuss how to support new mothers; and
- Instead of RNOM board members making the traditional Medicine Pouches, we intend to hold gatherings at the Library to assemble the pouches. This will provide another gathering of community to discuss how we can support new mothers.

Join with other organizations to enact changes in the best interest of the new mothers through:

- RNOM is beginning meetings with other organizations in Regina who are advocates for new mothers to determine where RNOM can help with Reproductive Justice.