

Drum Birthing Ceremony awakens connections

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By Nate Smelle

For more than a year now the Algonquin Inodewiziwin EarlyON Child and Family Centre at Maynooth Public School has been bringing families together, while increasing awareness of Indigenous culture, history and language. Through facilitating and participating in the wide variety of programs and workshops offered, the team of educators teaching at the centre can attest to how beneficial their teachings have been to the families who participate, and to the community as a whole.

On Monday, Nov. 18 members of the Algonquin community gathered at the Algonquin Inodewiziwin EarlyON Child and Family Centre to provide local families with an opportunity to take part in a Drum Birthing Ceremony.

Program coordinator Christine McRae has been instrumental in developing and delivering the Indigenous education programming offered by the centre since its inception. She said they decided to host the Drum Birthing Ceremony after several community members were invited to make drums to be used in Algonquin Inodewiziwin EarlyON programs and in the children's classrooms at North Hastings Children's Services. McRae explained that the reason for the ceremony is to "awaken the drum and give the drum its voice."

Algonquin Elder Ada Tinney began the ceremony with a smudging. Before inviting the group to give each of the drums their unique voice, she took a few moments to offer thanks to the Creator.

"We offer thanks to Mother Earth for providing us the tree used to make our drums - a tree which was standing once and providing us with many things," said Tinney.

"The cedar gives a lovely sound to our drums. We thank the spirit of the deer who has given up its life. We are reminded of the deer that gave us these drums and their voice."

Acknowledging the cultural and spiritual significance of the drum and drumming during Indigenous ceremonies and celebrations, McRae added "The drum beat represents the heartbeat of our Mother, the Earth. It reminds us that we are connected, that the earth is part of who we are and where we come from. It reminds us that we are a sacred part of creation, along with the trees, plants, animals, water, stones."

Noting that it is traditional practice to always give away the first drum that someone makes, McRae said any families who took part in the first drum making workshop are invited to attend the next drum workshop to make drums for their own families. She said families who have not yet made a drum but wish to in the future, are also welcome to join the next workshop.

Expressing her gratitude to all who attended the recent Drum Birthing Ceremony on Nov. 18, McRae said "It made my heart so full to have so many community members join us for this ceremony. To have many Algonquin people, as well as community allies, join us and support us to bring these drums to life was an amazing experience. Chi-miigwetch to all who joined us for both the ceremony and the feast."