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SURVIVORS' VOICES GUIDE THE FUTURE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE *WHAT WE HEARD* REPORT ON ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION SITE REVITALIZATION

Williams Lake, BC – November 5, 2025 – Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) announced today the release of its *What We Heard* Report, a comprehensive summary of community engagement conducted to guide the future revitalization and commemoration of the former St. Joseph's Mission Residential School (SJM) site.

In 2023, Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) purchased 14 acres of the property that once housed the St. Joseph's Mission Indian Residential School (SJM). In 2024, the SJM Investigative Team was tasked by WLFN Chief and Council with engaging Survivors of the SJM, as well as the loved ones of those who attended, on how best to proceed with commemoration at the site.

Between April and June 2025, WLFN planned and hosted seven engagement sessions focused on the revitalization of the SJM site. To ensure as many Survivors as possible were reached, five sessions were conducted in person, with two offered online. The sessions were held in Williams Lake, Lillooet, Kamloops, and Quesnel, with two virtual sessions held in June 2025. WLFN acknowledges that children were removed from over 43 Indigenous communities to the SJM, many of them from geographically disparate areas. The engagement sessions were designed to ensure inclusivity, and to honour those who were taken from their homes.

These engagement sessions were aimed at Survivors of the Mission, their loved ones, and their community members, in recognition of the fact that the Indian Residential School system impacted not only those who were forced to attend, but their families and communities as well. Throughout the sessions, attendees shared their perspectives regarding the site's revitalization. To encourage discussion about the SJM site's future, participants were asked the following questions:

1. What should be done with the SJM site?
2. How do you want the SJM site to look?



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3. How do you want the SJM site to feel?

4. How would you like to see those who attended the SJM commemorated?

Feedback on revitalizing the SJM site was gathered through a combination of group discussions and surveys. Acknowledging that not all participants were comfortable speaking in front of large groups of people, physical surveys with the above listed questions were provided to ensure fulsome participation. Offering multiple opportunities and platforms to share feedback helped to ensure Survivors, community members, and loved ones, could share their thoughts in whichever way felt most comfortable, and that as many voices as possible were heard.

Cultural and health supports were made available to participants at every session, throughout the entirety of the session. Staff from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS), Elders from local communities, and members of WLFN's Health & Wellness and Culture Departments were present to provide cultural and health support as needed. Leadership from WLFN was also present at several of the engagement sessions to hear firsthand what Survivors, their loved ones, and community members need from the engagement sessions, and SJM site revitalization processes, and the outcomes that they hoped for.

WLFN contracted Mahihkan Management, an Indigenous- owned management company, to support these engagement sessions. Mahihkan was tasked with providing a facilitator, notetaker, and graphic recorder for every session. The facilitator guided the conversation, encouraged active participation, and kept the group aligned with the agenda, while the graphic recorder captured the day's dialogue through illustrative visuals on oversized foamboards, and notetaker compiled extensive notes about the feedback heard during the session. Mahihkan also compiled a final "What We Heard Report," (WWHR) reflecting the hopes and recommendations shared by participants for the future of the site. The results of this WWHR will be integrated into all future planning initiatives for the SJM site revitalization process.

WLFN would like to acknowledge that information regarding Indian Residential Schools could be triggering for some people. A crisis support line at the Indian Residential School Survivors Society can be reached at 1-866-925-4419 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For further information in relation to this release, or to discuss opportunities for media engagement, please contact:

Brandon Hoffman

p. 250-296-3507 Ext. 185

e. brandon.hoffman@wlfm.ca