

community action grant



March 28, 2017

MLSE FOUNDATION AWARDS \$50,000 TORONTO RAPTORS COMMUNITY ACTION GRANT PRESENTED BY JUST ENERGY FOUNDATION TO NORTHERN NISHNAWBE EDUCATION COUNCIL

On Monday evening, MLSE Foundation announced Northern Nishnawbe Education Council as this year's recipient of the *Toronto Raptors Community Action Grant presented by the Just Energy Foundation* at Air Canada Centre. MLSE Foundation representatives were joined by Just Energy's Vice President of Consumer Sales, Richard Teixeira and Vice President of Treasury, Kate Atkinson, as well as a staff member and participants of the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council's winning program. The \$50,000 grant will support the *Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program*, which provides youth from 24 remote First Nations communities the opportunity to play.

"Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball is a model program for MLSE Foundation to support," said Michael Bartlett, Executive Director, MLSE Foundation. "We are passionate about growing sport in the places that need it most across our province. Thanks to our partnership with the Just Energy Foundation, we are able to provide the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council with \$50,000 to support this program that provides so many kids the opportunity to play and develop valuable life skills so they can continue to grow within their communities."

Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program develops the basic skills of the game and provides youth an opportunity to build self-esteem, learn about values such as perseverance and resilience, develop strong leadership and social skills, develop their identity, as well as help students develop a sense of belonging within their school community. The program supports both boys' and girls' basketball teams and helps to keep youth engaged in healthy active lifestyles, deterring high-risk behavior while learning valuable life skills. *Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program* strives to create strong leaders on and off the court.

"The Thunderhawks Basketball Program is extremely thankful to be awarded this grant through the MLSE Foundation and Just Energy," said Norma Kejick, Executive Director of Northern Nishnawbe Education Council. "The program will support our student leaders and provide further opportunities to lead healthy, safe and active lifestyles. The program will help to keep our students motivated to learn and raise graduation rates. Thanks to this tremendous opportunity, we're confident that our students will also share their knowledge and love of the game when they head back to their communities; inspiring the next generation of Indigenous youth in Northern Ontario."

Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball is just one of many programs organized by the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council. The council is directed by Chiefs of 24 Sioux Lookout District First Nations and is a non-profit educational organization delivering education to advance First Nations self-government, self-determination, and economic self-sufficiency. As part of the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council's full-service school model, it offers many recreational programs with the aim of encouraging good physical and mental health.

(MORE)

“The Just Energy Foundation is delighted to be supporting Northern Nishnawbe Education Council to help them deliver recreational programs and otherwise inaccessible opportunities for First Nations youth to develop a sense of identity, purpose and community belonging” said Kate Atkinson. “For these students who come from such remote areas, the social and leadership skills, values, and self-esteem they gain from peer interaction through organized sports such as the Thunderhawks Indigenous Basketball Program, can be life-changing.”

The Toronto Raptors, Toronto FC and Toronto Maple Leafs Community Action Grants are three \$50,000 sport-specific grants presented by the Just Energy Foundation that MLSE Foundation will award to charitable organizations supporting youth sports programming each year. Eligible organizations can apply for all grants at mlsefoundation.org, where submissions are reviewed by a selection committee before a winner is chosen and announced.

About Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program

Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (N.N.E.C.) was incorporated in 1979 as an area Education Authority and is directed by the Chiefs of the 24 Sioux Lookout District First Nations. N.N.E.C. is a First Nations, band empowered, non-profit educational organization delivering secondary and post-secondary values-based education to advance First Nations self-government, self-determination, and economic self-sufficiency. N.N.E.C. operates 3 First Nation's high schools in Northern Ontario. Their students leave remote Northern communities by plane to attend high school without the support of their family and friends, in a place that is unfamiliar to them. If it were not for these unique schools, it would not be possible for these First Nation's students to achieve a high school diploma, as there are very few high schools on-reserve, and even fewer that offer courses past Grade 10. Many youth in these programs grow up in poverty and face social challenges. These challenges accompany youth to school and are exacerbated by isolation and depression, leading to high-risk behavior (including but not limited to drug and alcohol abuse, gang affiliation, and suicide). As part of their full-service school model, N.N.E.C. offers many recreational programs with the aim of encouraging good physical and mental health- Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program is one of these programs.

The First Nation's students served by the Thunder Hawks Indigenous Basketball Program hail from 24 remote First Nations communities and often grow up without the means to engage in a healthy active lifestyle due to a lack of equipment (indoor/outdoor) and programming. Aside from learning the basic skills of the game, the program provides youth an opportunity to build self-esteem, to learn about values such as perseverance and resilience, to develop strong leadership and social skills, to develop their identity, as well as help students develop a sense of belonging within our school community. The program supports both boys and girls' basketball teams, but also operates before and after each season in order to keep our youth engaged in healthy active lifestyles, deterring them from high-risk behavior while learning valuable life skills. This basketball program creates strong leaders on and off the court.

About MLSE Foundation

MLSE Foundation believes all kids should have access to sport and the opportunity to develop lasting dreams on the playing field. With the support of MLSE's teams, the Foundation funds the refurbishment of local athletic facilities and programs that support kids through sports and recreation. Since launching in December 2009, the MLSE Foundation has invested more than \$19 million into our community. For more information visit mlsefoundation.org, or follow @MLSEFoundation

About Just Energy Foundation

The Just Energy Foundation was established in 2013 by Just Energy Group Inc. to help registered Canadian and U.S. charitable organizations secure the resources required to promote the health and well-being of communities in need. Funded entirely by Just Energy, the Foundation invests in local programs that work to enhance the quality of life in Just Energy's operating markets towards building stronger and supportive communities. Visit justenergyfoundation.com to learn more.

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