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SASKATCHEWAN CANCER AGENCY

FIRST NATION STUDENT ART BRINGS HOPE, COURAGE AND STRENGTH FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Patients and visitors at the Allan Blair Cancer Centre will find inspiration in artwork, thanks to the efforts of grade 11 and 12 students from Ochapowace First Nation. With the guidance of artist and Elder Michael Lonechild, students created a unique painting to provide a more welcoming experience for patients receiving treatment.

The piece consists of three canvases illustrating a herd of buffalo on the prairies. For many First Nations, the buffalo is a spiritual animal that often symbolizes strength and the ability to survive. The English title is Hope, Courage and Strength and it is called Wapi Paskwawi Moscosis (which means White Buffalo Calf) in Cree.

"We're pleased to display the creative talents of Saskatchewan's First Nation youth," said Dr. Jon Tonita, Interim President and Chief Executive Officer of the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. "Their work will serve as a reminder that healthcare is about more than medical treatments; it needs to be inclusive of holistic care and that includes working with indigenous people to understand their needs and traditions."

Ochapowace First Nation initiated the artwork as a project through the First Nations and Métis Cancer Surveillance Program. The program was a three-year collaboration between the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations to improve cancer control among Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis people within the healthcare system and gain insight into how to better serve these communities.

The program, which wrapped up this spring, started in 2014 and was funded through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. Ochapowace First Nation was one of five participating communities, and focused on cancer awareness and prevention especially among youth.

"Over the course of this program our students and others in the community learned how they can take control of their health by living a balanced lifestyle and making healthy choices," said Chief Margaret Bear, Ochapowace First Nation. "These are our future leaders and it's encouraging to see how they came together to illustrate their message of hope for cancer patients who are undergoing treatment."

The artwork will be installed at the cancer centre in the next couple of weeks.

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