



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First Light to Mark National Indigenous Peoples Day with Full Schedule of All-Virtual Events

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

First Light is excited to announce a full week of special programming leading up to National Indigenous Peoples Day (NIPD) on June 21, 2020. Because of the ongoing public health emergency due to COVID-19, this year's events will take place exclusively online. "NIPD is about recognizing and honouring the significant contributions of Indigenous Peoples to Canadian society," said Stacey Howse, Director of Programs with First Light. "As difficult as it is for us not to be able to gather in the same physical space this year, our community is strong and resilient. We're moving forward with new and innovative ways to come together even in the midst of the pandemic."

With funding support from Canadian Heritage, the weeklong schedule of events runs from June 15 to 21, 2020, and includes a variety of musical performances, arts-based workshops, and contests. Events will feature Elders, storytellers, artists, and community leaders from across the province, including Chief Mi'sel Joe, Elizabeth Penashue, and Celina Kalluk. Other highlights include:

- Presentation of the inaugural Indigenous Advocate Award, a new initiative led by First Light's Urban Indigenous Coalition. The award will be announced on the morning of Thursday, June 18, and an interactive, online conversation with the award recipient will follow later that afternoon.
- A virtual Community Feast, which will take place on Friday, June 19, beginning at 5pm. Meal kits will be delivered to participants in partnership with local non-profit Fishing for Success. The kits will include everything needed to prepare a traditional NL favourite of salt cod with drawn butter and potatoes.

While some events require advance registration, all are free and open to the public, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. A detailed schedule of events can be found online at <https://sjnfc.wildapricot.org/>.

Although the federal government only began officially recognizing NIPD – then known as National Aboriginal Day – in 1996, Indigenous communities across Canada have long celebrated Indigenous history and culture on June 21 to coincide with the Summer Solstice. In St. John’s, which has the fastest growing Indigenous population of any urban centre in Canada, First Light has traditionally organized an annual Sunrise Ceremony in Bannerman Park. That ceremony will not be able to take place this year because of COVID-19. Yet as Jenelle Duval, Arts and Culture Coordinator with First Light, put it: “During these uncertain times, it’s more important than ever for our communities to come together to find strength, beauty, and resilience in the vibrant and thriving cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples.”

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Formerly known as the St. John’s Native Friendship Centre, First Light is a registered non-profit that has been serving both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in St. John’s since 1983. The organization provides programs and services rooted in the revitalization, strengthening, and celebration of Indigenous cultures and languages in the spirit of trust, respect, and friendship.