



TSESHAHT FIRST NATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA RELEASE
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BRINGING OUR CHILDREN HOME AND HONOURING SURVIVORS

čišaaʔath (Tseshaht) First Nation begins the search for lost souls at the Alberni Indian Residential School

(Port Alberni, British Columbia) čišaaʔath (Tseshaht) First Nation has begun the foundational work to locate unmarked graves at the Alberni Indian Residential School site and to reclaim lost souls by creating connections with ancestors of those who did not return home. The creation of its project team, ʔuuʔatumin yaqckʷiimitqin (Doing it for our Ancestors), is grounded in values and lead by culture. Led by **čišaaʔath** (Tseshaht) member, Melissa Gus, the team has begun gathering the knowledge needed to prepare the community and site for ground penetrating radar scanning. The team has also been working toward providing wellness-focused support to survivors who generously and courageously share their stories and experiences.

“We are acutely aware of the large task at hand,” noted Wahmeesh (Ken Watts), Elected Chief Councillor. “This is not work we take lightly. As we ask survivors to share their knowledge and experiences with our research and investigation team, we are fully committed to providing cultural support to them through every stage of this process.”

Survivors have guided this project since the beginning and have been meeting regularly to help shape the way forward. An announcement will be made for when scanning will begin, which won’t happen until soil conditions are ideal, and the project team will ensure steps are taken to secure the area throughout the entire scanning process to maintain a high-level of protection and privacy.

“Over the next few months, our members and the public can potentially expect to see more people at the site and drones doing LiDAR scanning,” explained Wahmeesh (Ken Watts), Elected Chief Councillor. “Communication is key throughout this project. Survivors, youth and the public will receive updates either in person, in print or on our



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website. We hope to undertake the first phase scanning of ground penetrating radar (GPR) in spring or summer of this year.”

Statement gathering will be an important component of the research process. The research team intends to design the process in a way that will be accessible and supportive to Survivors and their family members. There will be an option to submit a statement online at the project website page (coming soon), as well as hybrid in-person/online statement gathering events in the coming months. Once information gathering and scanning is complete, the Nation will provide an update on how the announcement of the results will be released.

“The Alberni Indian Residential School was located on our traditional territory, and we feel a sacred obligation to lead this project, with culture and healing at the forefront for our people. We are guided by survivors, ha’wiih (hereditary chiefs), council and our people to give this project the honour, respect and dignity it deserves,” emphasized Wahmeesh (Ken Watts), Elected Chief Councillor. “Indigenous communities are struggling. Now, more than ever, we are losing loved ones in unprecedented numbers while dealing with news that continues to trigger trauma for our people. Two weeks ago, Williams Lake First Nation announced the discovery of 93 potential graves of lost souls who attended the St. Joseph Mission Residential School. This pain is felt by all Indigenous people and **ćišaaʔath** (Tseshaht) First Nation stands with this Nation and all Nations who are being called to do this important work for their communities.”

In addition to these efforts, the **ćišaaʔath** (Tseshaht) First Nation has begun fundraising for a memorial to honour all those who attended the Alberni Indian Residential School. To date, the Nation has raised over \$60,000 in donations.

For the latest information, or to contribute to the memorial, please visit www.tseshaht.com/airs-team.



About Tseshaht First Nation

ćišaaʔath (Tseshaht) First Nation has over 1200 registered members whose **ħaaħuułi**



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(territory) extends from the Broken Group Islands, including areas in central Barkley Sound, up both sides of the Alberni Inlet and the entire Alberni valley as well as a large part of the interior of central Vancouver Island. Tseshah First Nation is one of the 14 member Nations of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council. For more information, please visit www.tseshah.com.

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