

Sew & Sew Skills Lab Update – September 7, 2021

The Sew & Sew Skills Lab program was initiated by the Art for Aid Project (AFAP), which is now under the Cdn registered charity *I Love First Peoples* (ILFP) umbrella of programs.



Program History: The Sew & Sew Skills Lab was first launched in May of 2019 in Natuashish, Northern Newfoundland after Colleen Gray was invited to visit the Mushuau Innu Natuashish School with ILFP. After spending time with the students and staff at the school, she found herself wanting to do more to support their creative education and spoke with the principal about setting up a sewing program for the students. The staff was excited about the possibility. Upon returning home, Colleen began collecting gently used sewing machines and sewing supplies. With a generous measure of support from the wonderful people who support AFAP, along with the Rotary Clubs of Palgrave and Oakville, the shipment headed north. Once they arrived, the machines were immediately set up and the sewing of costumes for a school play became the first order of business.

CBC report: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/sewing-machines-art-for-aid-natuashish-1.5325727?fbclid=IwAR05n92FT3HHck2QotNf6M1ZfEaIB612fj027ivCTKISPEKa2Awf4we4ZM>

The program start was good, but it was easy to see that this could be more.

Josee Lusignan, (president of ILFP) and Colleen began formulating a plan to develop a fully equipped sewing skills lab that they could offer to remote northern schools. Sewing gives young people a fun way to be creative while learning a valuable skill. But beyond this, a good quality sewing machine can benefit the entire community. Canvas tents, for example, and warm, waterproof clothing are essential tools for communities that live off the land. These are often hard to repair without adequate machines.

The Schools: The program is now being launched in 4 communities in 2021/2022. To date the schools receiving the Sew & Sew Skills Lab program are as follows:

Nassivik High School, Pond Inlet, Nunavut – *located on northern Baffin Island. 200 students/Grades 7-12*

Iglulik High School, Igloolik, Nunavut - *Igloolik is an Inuit hamlet in Foxe Basin, Qikiqtaaluk Region in Nunavut. The name "Igloolik" means "there is a house here". 180 students/Grades 10-12*

Jens Haven Memorial School, Nain Labrador - *Nain or Naina is the northernmost permanent settlement in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, within the Nunatsiavut region.*

206 students/Grade K-12

Mushuau Innu Natuashish School, Natuashish, Northern Newfoundland - *Natuashish is an Innu community that once resided at Davis Inlet. The community was moved in 2002 because of poor living conditions. 300 students/K-12*

Janome Canada: After doing some research online, we found an affordable children's machine manufactured by Janome, which we believed would suit elementary level learning. Josee reached out to Janome, asking if they would partner in the program. The VP of Janome Canada, deeply moved upon hearing Josée's first-hand accounts of her extensive travels to the North and of the lack of resources, immediately offered to support Sew & Sew. He also pointed out that the machines we had identified would not be sturdy enough to benefit the program in the long-term, nor would they be useful if we wanted to extend the program to high school learners, which we did. Janome offered to donate 60 machines to our program, each retailing at \$950.00.

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Janome also offered to provide child safety guards to protect little fingers while they learn the craft. Additionally, Janome Canada offered to do a drive for program materials through their online community and have them shipped to the ILFP office in Quebec. What outstanding support!



Back to front: Dave Rooke (President of Rotary Club of Ottawa-Stittsville), Iain Speers (Director General of I Love First Peoples), Josee Lusignan (President of I Love First Peoples), Colleen Gray (Art for Aid Project)

At AFAP, we know how much people love to support the work we do, so we invited our supporters to contribute sewing and quilting supplies to the program. They came through in true AFAP fashion, filling a 20-foot locker in 2.5 hours with a remarkable outpouring of excellent quality sewing and quilting supply donations. The end result was that this summer all 4 schools received 10 boxes of program supplies along with their sewing machines and the program is ready to launch for this new school year!

What next: With the 10 remaining machines, we are working to establish the program in a school location that has the needed infrastructure to sustainably house the Sew & Sew Skills Lab program. A lot of work goes into determining where we can successfully place this powerful program. There has to be enough space to house the machines, work tables and program supplies, as well as staff and other

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transportation-related considerations. Our work in Pond Inlet and Igloolik (Nunavut) was made possible thanks to the very generous support of Baffinland, and we are currently exploring avenues for extending our work in Nunavut through this partnership.



We have invited the teachers from participating schools to submit photographs of the program in action so we can include them in our final year-end report to be shared with our donors and. In the years ahead, we will be visiting the schools with an Indigenous clothing designer who will bring creative vision to the program in real time, and with Janome facilitators who are also eager to share their knowledge. We will be hosting an event to showcase the sewing skills of the students and when we have information to share, we'll be sure to provide pictures and progress reports on our web pages and social media.

Furthermore, we will annually support the existing programs with sewing supplies and will work to fill wish lists so the schools can continue building on their existing programs. The Sew & Sew Skills Lab will be a creative portal for young hands to learn a wonderful and valuable skill. Annual collections for sewing supplies will take place in the spring.

Monetary donations to Sew & Sew can be made through ILFP by selecting Sew & Sew under the Donations tab or by designating donations made by cheque to the Sew & Sew program. Charitable tax receipts are issued each February.

To learn more about our work, please visit www.artforaid.ca and www.ilfp.ca