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NOVEMBER 1ST marks the beginning of an unprecedented show of solidarity and active support for reconciliation, as people across Canada turn their hearts toward home and fill gift-filled shoeboxes for Indigenous children and youth living in remote and semi-remote communities.

“It’s like a tidal wave of love and friendship about to wash over Canada, and it’s high time,” says Josée Lusignan, president and founder of I Love First Peoples, the charity behind this mass effort.

“For too long, Canadians have either turned a blind eye, lived in denial or felt totally powerless as they hear of the devastation the youth are facing – rampant suicides, poor access to basic services like education and health, dirty water, food insecurity, trauma, abuse – it’s got to stop! The truth is, we are not powerless. I am grateful beyond belief to see so many people taking action with us to say *it’s time for change.*”

Canadians this year have an opportunity to pack gift-filled shoeboxes as an expression of their friendship and support, and to help the organizers pursue their mission of empowering Indigenous youth toward education. Shoeboxes will be used to support communities in each province and territory where they are raised.

I Love First Peoples uses the gift-filled shoeboxes to organize school celebration events, typically attended by celebrity role models, and then builds on the relationships with the communities to support students on an ongoing basis, primarily through awards programs.

“We’re all about celebrating education and fostering reconciliation,” says Lusignan.

To this end, I Love First Peoples has held several other events of national significance, namely the first event at the ACC during a Toronto Maple Leafs game vs. Edmonton Oilers to honour Indigenous people. The idea is to make reconciliation a part of everyday conversation, to bring awareness, education and ensure that all youth in Canada are no longer hindered by the prejudices that weaken us today.

The I Love First Peoples gift-filled shoebox campaign will run across Canada from November 1st to 30th, with over 25 chapters ready to receive shoebox gifts.



“What we are seeing unfold is extraordinary. Even in our chapters, to see such a diversity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members working together to make this happen is a perfect demonstration of what Turtle Island ought to be,” adds Lusignan.

Many high-profile celebrities are lending their name in support of this effort, to further build this wave of support like has never yet been seen in our country for this important cause – namely:

- **George Stroumboulopoulos**, one of Canada’s most popular and respected television personalities and radio broadcasters who currently serves as the host *The Strombo Show* on CBC Radio 2.
- **Jennifer Podemski**, an award-winning and Gemini-nominated Indigenous film and television producer and actor, and co-executive producer of the Indspire Awards.
- **Duane Howard** a board member of I Love First Peoples and a highly regarded Indigenous actor and stuntman, best known for his role as Chief Elk Dog in the movie *The Revenant* with Leonardo DiCaprio.
- **Forrest Goodluck**, a young Native American actor starring in soon-to-be-released *Indian Horse*, and who played the role of Hawk also in the movie *The Revenant*.
- **Bruce Shisheesh**, former chief of Attawapiskat, who is best known for having sounded the alarm bell over the suicide crisis in his community, and for obtaining a meeting for himself and for the youth of his region with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.
- **Stacey Laforme**, elected Chief of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the current treaty holders for the Toronto Purchase area.
- **Alexandra Shimo**, a writer who was a shortlisted nominee for a 2014 Governor General's Award as cowriter of Edmund Metatawabin's memoir *Up Ghost River: A Chief's Journey Through the Turbulent Waters of Native History*.
- **Kelly Amaujaq Fraser**, originally from Sanikiluaq (Nunavut), she has performed countless concerts across Canada, especially in the Arctic where she is extremely well-known.
- **Sarah Siddiqui** is a Toronto-based singer songwriter who has also played in a film with Danny DeVito and Robin Williams.



Video shout-outs from these celebrities will be released throughout the campaign, with many more celebrities to be announced.

Even though the campaign launches officially on November 1st, hundreds of schools and school boards across Canada have embraced the initiative and their drives are fully under way, as well as that of many corporations, small businesses, and community groups. Organizers wish to acknowledge and thank, especially:

- The staff at the **Assembly of First Nations headquarters** in Ottawa for getting involved and packing shoeboxes
- The **Canadian Chamber of Commerce** for encouraging all Chambers to mobilize businesses to show their care by packing shoeboxes as workplace initiatives or acting as drop-off locations in their communities
- Charity sponsors who are making this campaign possible

“For reconciliation to happen in practical terms, we need education, appreciation and action. And now is the time to get involved,” concludes Lusignan.

About

I Love First Peoples is a majority Indigenous Canadian registered charity that empowers youth to succeed through education and projects that promote reconciliation.

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