

A Note of Explanation on Cheque Process and a Short Community Update

Late in the Fall, we found ourselves in a similar position to that of every FN across Canada, in so far as we realized that we would not be able to celebrate together and hold seasonal feast/meal gatherings amongst members – both for those living in GBFN and those residing in Thunder Bay. To ensure we remained in compliance with the KZA Covid-19 Bylaws and regional public health measures and restrictions, Chief and Council made a decision to order and deliver groceries for delivery to each household as a contribution towards the family meal. At the same time, an electronic registration form went up on the GBFN.ca website advising members living outside of GB to complete/submit prior to the cut-off date of December 17th.

The task of administrating that list quickly became overwhelming, not only because of the number of forms, but due in large part to the efforts it took to verify the information provided. Legitimately qualified and eligible household submissions included both complete AND incomplete information with innocently made errors (status reg. numbers and provision of FULL addresses being primary sources which needed correction). Sadly, we also had to administrate forms that were seemingly attempts to defraud the FN which included the submission of names of members who live in GBFN (who thought they would apply anyway), multiple forms submitted by multiple individuals in the same household/address OR multiple forms submitted by the same individual giving different addresses, people who fabricated names and/or status numbers, and numerous other examples.

The verification task was time-consuming to say the least and was required to be undertaken by those having the administrative capacity who were already engaged on a number of other projects. It had to also be balanced amongst FN priority activities (namely vaccination hub site prep, training and preparation of numerous roll-out needs and activities) all requiring immediate responses to assure GB members' positions were held for both on and off-reserve vaccine programs planned across the region. Further, the confirmation of membership information cannot be conducted in any manner, other than verifying what members provide, as GB's Registration List is held in trust by Indigenous Services Canada who will not share a member's confidential information with GB.

This explanation is offered with the hopes to alleviate the concerns that there is not uniformity between the two seasonal meal contribution activities. The delay was not intentional but was caused by operational pressures, given staff capacity and the volume of work. Food delivered in GBFN was NOT a part of any social assistance program, but was purchased through Gaming as Community Development. The amount of groceries each house received was purposefully ordered with the number of adults and children residing in the home in mind. Similarly, the cheques being distributed reflect the EXACT same retail dollar figure that a GB household of equitable size received. There were four separate family categories made and the quantities/sizes of food items were reflective of the number of individuals residing within: 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and over 10 people.

Important to note that **unlike per capita/per registered member settlement processes**, the groceries/monies were meant for **FAMILY consumption – and were not allocated per person**. With that as reference, submissions that were made individually by each adult of any household (with the same address) were merged together in the EXACT way that groceries were delivered in GBFN to home with multiple adult residents. The purpose of the cheques was to provide some assistance by making a **small contribution toward your family's holiday feast**. Each household was broken into the family group size categories and the retail amount of the groceries that was given to a GB resident household represents the same amount of money for which your cheque was drawn. Further, for every GB registered minor child included in the household form, an allocation of \$50 per verified child on your submission was added to your cheque. In GBFN, each minor child received a \$50 gift card. As we hope you can see, every effort was made to ensure that there was complete parity and equity between those members living in and outside of GBFN.

Citing the numerous operational impacts of Covid-19, it is worthwhile in reiterating that it has been quite challenging to administrate many, if not all, programs with Crown, project or outside agencies staff, as safety protocols require meetings be conducted virtually with people who are working from their homes and lack access to their peers, files and information normally located in their offices. But as each person has ways to push through Covid-related challenges successfully, so have we.

There are numerous infrastructure projects currently underway in GBFN that have taken years to advocate for support, to secure the funding, and, finally, to execute the construction. Here are just a few of the highlights happening in KZA. The new **Water Treatment Plant** facility, located on Lake Nipigon, is well underway which will finally see our Nation removed from boil water advisory after more than twenty years since the first bungled project was dumped in our community. Later in the month, you will hear more in regards to the **10 new homes** set for application/occupation by members of GB. The **expansion of the Hydro Diesel Generation station** continues and is set to replace older equipment with more powerful machinery - integrated in a more environmentally friendly manner with our **MicroGrid solar array**. With an upgraded power generation source and readily available drinking water/fire suppression, the design and engineering can finally proceed on our **new school** - a life-long learning partnership with the Lakehead School Board. A phased-approach to the **installation of LED street-lights** has been ongoing over the past year, ensuring that consultation occurs and issues are addressed without compromising the fine balance between safety and general wellbeing. Tendering of the **GBFN roads rehabilitation project** is set to go out this month and coordination of an **upgraded highway on/off ramp** safety project will see not only safer exit/entrance conditions for members/visitors to the community, but also a superior internal road surface, grade and defined/functional ditches throughout GB. Our **wastewater lagoon expansion** project was recently approved commencing this summer and thereby permitting more housing expansion. The **solid waste management facility rehabilitation** has finally received the last set of approvals needed. Lastly, the **shoreline remediation project** is currently underway with construction beginning in the Spring, thereby ensuring that no further damages caused by erosion are incurred at our Health Centre, Ornge helipad, or in community lakefront homes/sheds.

In summary, GBFN is reaping the rewards of what has taken a good number of years to secure. These infrastructure projects, along with the **upcoming settlement processes of Larger Land Base, Flooding Grievances (with the remaining 2 parties), Highway Expropriation**, and an Impala **Impact Benefit Agreement**, will see KZA and its members in lucrative, powerful positions.

If anything, the past ten months has shown us what we can achieve when we are forced to make the difficult decisions and shoulder the hard work needed to protect our families and promote our Nation as a whole. When we put aside our individual, ideological or political differences and opinions, and when we recognize the need to act with collective responsibility, we soon come to realize the immense value that our actions bring to each and every person, to our dodems and our families, and to our Nation as one. Vaccination and a return to more 'normal' practises are close, but we must remain vigilant. The necessity to continue to follow the pandemic protocols of mask wearing, social distancing, hand washing/sanitizing and limiting exposure times to one another time ensures that, at some point in the near future, we may soon find ourselves at a time when we are all strong, healthy and well - and in a place where we can once again gather together safely.

Chief, Council and Staff work diligently all year long to keep the operations of the Nation moving forward in a positive way and to relentlessly advocate and promote the interests of our Nation and its Citizens. Together, our small but determined team in GBFN continues to work on a daily basis making certain that vital services are available to members - no matter where they might reside - and we ask that Citizens of KZA, as valuable team partners, continue to offer each other the encouragement, support and kind consideration as our Nation journeys on. **Chi-miigwetch**