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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**First cohort graduate from Mi'gmaq led peacekeeping program**

MI'GMAG'I –On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 14 individuals from Mi'gmaq communities across the province became part of the inaugural cohort of Mi'gmaq Peacekeeping Inc. (MPI) graduates, becoming *Wantaqo'tikewinu'k* or 'Peacekeepers' in their community. MPI is a proactive Mi'gmaq led alternative to enforcement-based approaches, setting itself apart from conventional policing methods. MPI is conducted with the support of with Mi'gmawel Tplu'taqnn Inc.

“Congratulations to the graduates. This is a huge milestone for these individuals and our communities. Having someone in the community we can turn to, who understands the issues, and has the appropriate training, will have a huge impact on the safety and well-being of our communities,” said Chief George Ginnish, Co-Chair of MTI and Chief of Natoaganeg.

Recognizing the limitations of traditional policing, a seven-week program was developed that centered on justice and community safety, guided by Mi'gmaq laws, Indigenous knowledge, and relevant reports. developed with community experts. This program was facilitated by the New Brunswick Community College System and combined comprehensive in-class learning and practical sessions. The training focused on effective communication skills, de-escalation and conflict management, an understanding of criminal law, defensive tactics, and conflict resolution models. Each graduate is equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the well-being of their communities.

While MPI is open to collaboration with police forces and frontline organizations, the primary objective is for Peacekeepers to independently assess situations, working to de-escalate tensions effectively.

The program's significance is best captured by Tristan Sock, one of the Peacekeepers who completed the program. Tristan shared, "I'm doing this job for my children and community members. We are not just Peacekeepers. We are friends, family, cousins, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts. We are the ones that will show up first; we are there to help our communities feel safe."

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To ensure a seamless introduction of the Peacekeeping, or *Wantaqo'tikewinu'k* program, community engagement sessions will be conducted in each participating community. These sessions aim to educate community members about program priorities and provide information on how to access the services of *Wantaqo'tikewinu'k* peacekeepers when needed.

There are already plans in place to continue the training and another cohort of community members will start in Spring 2024.

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