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New Indigenous Court in Williams Lake to improve delivery of Justice

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Provincial Court Chief Judge Melissa Gillespie announced today that British Columbia's seventh Indigenous sentencing court will open in Williams Lake in April 2020.

Indigenous Courts currently operate in six B.C. communities - New Westminster, Duncan, Kamloops, North Vancouver, Merritt and Prince George. The Indigenous Court working group in Williams Lake invited the Provincial Court to work with them to develop a court process that could help address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people involved in the criminal justice system.

As a result of their initiative, the Court was involved in the process of consultation and planning with the Indigenous community, B.C.'s Ministry of Attorney General, the community of Williams Lake, B.C. Community Corrections, lawyers, the Legal Services Society, the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of B.C., the Law Foundation, police, and support services groups.

Today's announcement is a significant step in the ongoing process of community involvement in the creation of innovative solutions to improve the delivery of justice. In May 2020, the Court will begin sitting monthly at the Williams Lake courthouse.

The opening ceremony for the Court will take place in April 2020. Further details to follow in due course. The event will be open to the public.

An Indigenous Court is a sentencing court. It provides an Indigenous perspective, based on a holistic and restorative approach, to sentencing Indigenous persons who have acknowledged responsibility for their criminal offence(s). Local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have completed a program of orientation give advice on a healing plan. The healing plan may then be incorporated as part of a fit sentence for the Indigenous person who has pled guilty.

For more information, please contact the Legal Officer, Office of the Chief Judge, using the Media Inquiry Form at <https://www.provincialcourt.bc.ca/Media>.