

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 17, 2012

Interim First Nations Health Authority  
FNHA2012-DM05

## **National recognition for BC First Nation Woman's swim for cancer**

COAST SALISH TERRITORY (Vancouver) – The *interim* First Nations Health Authority (*iFNHA*) would like to congratulate Tsimshian First Nation's Dayna McKay with her 'Into the Sea, Cancer Free' fundraising initiative and swim from Port Simpson to Prince Rupert on BC's north coast in 19 hours. McKay was honoured in front of Chiefs from across the country by Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo at their Annual General Meeting in Toronto on July 17.

Her swim and fundraising campaign is an inspiration for many and her personal dedication and commitment has reached new lengths for raising cancer awareness. Training and fundraising for over three years, the work was dedicated to her Uncle Billy Sampson who is battling prostate cancer after being diagnosed in 2009.

"I didn't realize this swim would touch people of all Nations. I heard a lot of drums, a lot of singing and chanting while I was in the water," said McKay. "The most important part for me was that my Uncle Billy was there the whole time, from the planning, to the preparation, to when I started the swim and when I arrived. It was all about him."

McKay started her swim on June 21 at 3 a.m. in Port Simpson and landed in Prince Rupert to a celebrating crowd at 10:50 p.m. coinciding with National Aboriginal Day. The swim was a beacon of light for her Uncle and gave hope to his battle against the disease.

"It really changed him. He saw people who care and wanted him to make it through. It gave him hope, it encouraged him and was an inspiration," she said. "I'm very thankful of how many people were there to support me and how emotional this was for other people. I want all people who are touched by cancer to never give up."

Her ultimate goal is to help find a cure for cancer within her generation and she hopes her swim and fundraising inspires others to follow their dreams. She is still raising funds through the 'Into the Sea, Cancer Free' Facebook page and has so far donated funds to the Port Simpson based Richard Wesley Foundation and the BC Cancer Foundation.

"A leader creates hope and helps us believe that the future will be better. Dayna McKay is a true leader – she inspires others and helps us to believe in a brighter future," said Grand Chief Doug Kelly, Chair of the First Nations Health Council who participated in the honouring ceremony. "She has drawn our attention to the importance of cancer prevention and research for a cure. Thank you to Dayna for her efforts and to the entire community that supported her."

The *i*FNHA has been inspired by McKay's drive to raise funds and awareness to end a disease that affects many First Nations communities across the country. Next Aboriginal Day, in honour of McKay, the organization will be launching an annual BC-wide 5-10 km run/walk event to raise awareness about priority health issues for BC First Nations, with cancer awareness as the inaugural theme inspired by McKay's swim.

"As BC First Nations wellness partner, the *i*FNHA is encouraged by Dayna McKay's leadership in raising awareness and funds in battling a disease that impacts many First Nations communities. Dayna is a great role model and a prime example of an individual living her life to be well," said Joe Gallagher, CEO of the *i*FNHA. "We want to celebrate the achievements of her historic swim and extend well wishes to her family and community, and hope for her Uncle Billy and all those battling cancer a swift recovery. Dayna's accomplishment shows us that wellness starts with the individual and is supported by our families, communities and health systems."

The annual run/walk is an example of the *i*FNHA's recently launched Health and Wellness Model in action. The Model is based on a holistic vision of health including spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects and takes into account the roles of the individual, family, community and Nation in ensuring good health. The *i*FNHA takes inspiration from Dayna McKay's individual journey and drive, and the momentous support from her community. It is a perfect example of BC First Nations leading the way in creating their Wellness health system.

**Photos of Dayna McKay's swim are available upon request.**

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